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Kyahna Freeman

The More Things Change

Fifty years ago, the governor of Alabama, George Wallace, made a vow to disregard the Brown vs. Board of Education decision keeping schools for blacks and whites separate. Wallace stated, “I draw the line in the dust, and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever.” Wallace’s dream, unlike Martin Luther King Junior’s dream, was to keep segregation in schools alive. Little did he know, his intentions for inequality in schools would continue today.

Having attended predominantly black public schools the majority of my life, I was exposed to very few worldly things except what was shown on CNN. Things such as education, family, and friends were all that had my attention, until I applied to one of the most prestigious all-white public schools in Mississippi, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. I thought this experience would expose me to more important things and other opportunities; however, I was sadly mistaken.

I learned about this school when I was a sophomore in high school from a representative. She was a black lady in her fifties, and she was a recruiter for the Delta region of Mississippi. She came and gave a presentation and even took some students on a tour of the school. I thought the opportunity was a good idea because I would be able to experience something new, and she was very convincing. She talked us through the application process that consisted of seventy pages, an interview, and creating a project in the field of science. When she finished discussing the application process, she explained that we would either receive a long white envelope meaning we got accepted into the school, or a short white envelope meaning we did not get into

the school. I completed the application, attended my interview, and a week later received the long white envelope.

I was excited because I was going to have a taste of the college life early on. Move-in day came and went, and classes soon started. Not even a month into the school, comments were made and there was talk about only letting black students in because money was received. There were no black teachers at the school and barely a handful of black students. The opportunities available (the main reason I decided to apply) were not directed towards me or any other black students at the school. Different clubs and activities that any white student wanted to establish were approved instantly; however, any black student who wanted to establish a club had to wait for what seemed like forever, and eventually it was forgotten about. One time, a group of black students signed a petition to get a course, African American History, established. A teacher had already agreed to teach the course; however, the wait to get the class approved was so long that we eventually gave up on the class. My recruiter even went as far to say she stayed on the recruitment and review board to make sure more blacks got into the school. Frustrated and disappointed, my positive views of the school were now diminishing.

On one occasion, I was in my history class and the subject was the Civil War. My history teacher stated, “George Washington was one of those people who owned slaves, but became enlightened in some way and freed his slaves.” The class was silent with the occasional sound of pencils scrubbing desks and side conversations.

Out of nowhere my classmate stated, “Haha! More like endarkened than enlightened because they were black.” The class went from hearing pencils and side conversations to dead silence. Every African American in the class just looked at him.

My history teacher stated, “Okay, I’m going to need for you not to say another word.” He laughed about it and said he was just stating the obvious. However, nothing was funny or obvious. After class, I and a few other classmates of mine approached the teacher and told her the comment made us feel very uncomfortable. She explained how she thought it was inappropriate also, and that she would talk to him. As I left the room, I thought to myself, all these years and nothing has changed. What a waste of resources and funding.

I didn’t let the comment get to me that much; however, I did take action. Not only did I work harder, but I also was invited back another year to be a part of the class of 2013. Of course I declined, because after that experience, I realized a school doesn’t make you. You make yourself. I attended a school in Memphis, Tennessee where I graduated with a 5.2 GPA; took Honor courses, college courses, and AP classes, obtained over \$530,000 in scholarships, and graduated at the top of my class.

Once thought of as a chance to receive equal opportunities, that prestigious high school is now thought of as a waste of time and resources. I thought I would be around better students, better resources, better facilities, and have better teachers. A lot of people think that inequality in schools was a problem of the past, but it’s not. It takes going into a new environment and experiencing it for only a small amount of time to realize little progress has been made to change society.